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SUBJECT: EASTERN DRC NOTES - FEBRUARY 19

¶1. (U) The items contained in this report consist principally of spot information from various sources. This report is not exhaustive, nor can all the information contained therein be confirmed at this time.

Operations against the FDLR

¶2. (SBU) The 21st FARDC brigade and an unknown number of RDF soldiers have taken positions approximately six kilometers south of Hombo. MONUC plans to establish a Temporary Operating Base in Hombo, giving the coalition a significant presence just south of the North Kivu/South Kivu border. The rugged terrain could emerge as a combat zone as the FDLR has a significant number of fighters only a few kilometers to the east. The FARDC continues to move troops into the border area to prevent FDLR units from moving into North Kivu.

¶3. (SBU) MONUC is investigating reports that 15 civilians were killed and 13 wounded in the small village of Nyakabasa, just south of Kibua in North Kivu. IDP's fleeing from the area said the FDLR was responsible for the retaliation attacks. IDP's also report that FDLR cadre burned 14-15 huts in Kapopo, west of the Lake Kivu town of Minova (Note: MONUC investigated previous reports of FDLR atrocities closer to Walikale, and found no evidence of killings. Some retaliatory attacks have occurred, but false reports have also surfaced. End note).

¶4. (SBU) FDLR forces moved out of Pinga and Kibua as RDF and FARDC units moved in, but the rebels severely damaged the Peti Bridge outside of Pinga before leaving. MONUC has flown approximately 160 FARDC soldiers and ammunition supplies into Pinga town. MONUC reported that about half of the Kibua residents who fled, expecting fighting, have already returned. MONUC also flew over 500 ex-CNDP fighters into Walikale in the past week, but earlier reports that these elements (under Colonel Makenga) were acting autonomously proved false. They may not be fully integrated, but are reportedly cooperating fully with the FARDC and reinforcing the 85th Brigade.

¶5. (SBU) There has been no fighting or RDF/FARDC movements further south of the North Kivu/South Kivu border, but FDLR elements have reportedly harassed the population, preventing movement and taxing and looting local communities. MONUC's South Kivu Brigade stated that an FDLR battalion has formed up at Ngandu, a small village southwest of Bukavu.

¶6. (SBU) MONUC briefers stated that RDF forces plan to commence withdrawal from the DRC on February 25-26.

Integration Update

¶7. (SBU) The regroupment center at Mubambiro has begun receiving PARECO and Mai Mai cadre, and a EUSEC visitor to the site reports 619 ex-combatants have now gathered there, expecting integration into the FARDC. The ex-combatants handed in a total of 110 weapons,

but then reportedly demanded them back to protest the lack of services at Mubambiro.

Refugee and CNDP Issues

¶18. (SBU) Civilian sources within MONUC advise that RDF units may have been ordering communities in Western Walikale territory to leave their homes "not because of fighting, but because the area is needed for the settlement of returning refugees" (Note: MONUC is on high alert over this report which, while possibly exaggerated or simply untrue, reportedly stemmed from credible sources. End note).

¶19. (SBU) Resentment reportedly remains high among CNDP/Nkunda sympathizers with respect to how the new CNDP management was installed, its lack of recent DRC experience or recognizable Congolese character, and the ways they seem too transparently to act as Rwandan proxies. Separately, it was reported that the GoR was irritated by the recent pro-Nkunda demonstrations staged in the camps. The camps have reportedly been sealed off, with what had been normal movements for trade and social purposes halted.

¶10. (SBU) Amid heavy media coverage, former North Kivu Governor Serufuli, who according to one report may take over soon from current Governor Paluku, visited a displacement camp and staged a "return" to areas of Rutshuru of approximately eight truckloads of displaced. OCHA reported that one of Serufuli's representatives has been moving among displaced persons in Minova, trying to convince them to return to their home areas.

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Engineering Improvements

¶11. (SBU) MONUC presented a review of UNOPS engineering operations on February 18, which included the following:

- improvements to the runway and airport at Beni;
- improvements to the runway and airport access roads at Dungu;
- improvements to roads to the west of Lake Albert;
- continuing work to clear and improve the Sake-Masisi-Nyabiondo road;
- expansion of the Goma fuel farm;
- improvements of the Uvira-Baraka road;
- improvements of the Mitti-Homboroad; and
- repair of two bridges.

FRF Hostage Crisis

¶12. (SBU) The FRF fighters who abducted a South Kivu Minister and Administrator over three weeks ago have agreed to release the hostages on February 20 without conditions. Abbe Malu Malu and Bizima Karahe helped negotiate the agreement at Kimombo, along with a senior MONUC official and a USG contractor. The FRF remains a volatile force, however, and has made three demands before it continues its participation in the Amani Peace Process: 1) return of two "defectors" (who allegedly tried to free the hostages by force, resulting in the death of an FRF major); 2) return of the arrested (now freed) Colonel Twemba to the Haut Plateau; and 3) return of arrested UK/Burundi dual national Dr. Jean Baptiste to the UK.

Risks to DDRRR

¶13. (SBU) DDRRR Head of Office told the International Facilitation team on February 18 that the DDRRR office in Pinga received a

threatening letter on February 14 that claimed it would kill anyone who participated in the program along with their families. On February 16, a local chief who met with DRRR officials in Pinga the previous day was found dead in a nearby forest. A local man who had worked with DRRR in Kasiki for several years as an envoy to the RUD was kidnapped on February 17 and was found dead on February 18. The Head of Office noted that DRRR staff members often take risks to promote repatriation, but he has stepped up security measures now that the risks have increased.

¶14. (SBU) DRRR Head of Office also noted that 4,000 Rwandans have been repatriated this year under DRRR and UNHCR programs, but he called the domestic DDR program a "disaster" that no longer adheres to the one man, one weapon rule. DDR centers are "accepting people without guns and arming them (to join the FARDC). It is nothing more than FARDC recruitment without disarmament."

GARVELINK